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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: SENATE VP JUAN CARLOS ROMERO
ENCOURAGES BILATERAL COOPERATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador met with Senate Vice President Juan Carlos Romero of the Kirchners' National Victory Front (FPV) on April 4 in his office to discuss greater bilateral legislative cooperation. Romero has occasionally been critical of GOA policy in the past and publicly disagreed with the executive branch's recent increase of agricultural export taxes. Romero proposed initiating long-term relations between the Argentine and U.S. Senates to foster better understanding between both countries. Ambassador welcomed the initiative and agreed that dialogue helps prevent misunderstandings. End summary.

Building Legislative Cooperation

¶2. (SBU) Romero shared with the Ambassador the March 31 Senate decree that established a U.S.-Argentina Friendship Committee in the Senate. The committee members include Senators Romero, Maria Eugenia Estensoro (Civic Coalition), and Liliana Negre de Alonso (Dissident Peronist Party). Romero said that he had his differences with the government but believed there was much the United States and Argentina could do to work together. Romero also shared with the Ambassador a letter to the U.S. Senate signed by members of the Friendship Committee plus Senators Ernesto Ricardo Sanz, Guillermo Raul Jeneffes, Carlos Alberto Reutemann, Juan Carlos Marino, concerning the export of fresh meat from Argentina urging a dialogue to discuss their livestock industry.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador welcomed Romero's initiative and cited Senator Shelby's recent visit as an example of U.S. legislative interest in Argentina. Ambassador suggested that a visit to Congress in Washington could be supplemented with other opportunities, including local think tanks that might be of interest.

Ag Strikes and the PJ

¶4. (SBU) Romero shared with Ambassador Wayne his views of the recent agriculture strike. He said that he was always against the export taxes because the federal government is not required to share those revenues with the provinces. Romero opined the export taxes were based on a mistaken view of taking from the farmers to subsidize industry, an approach that he said hurts investment. Romero expressed hope that the government would follow through on its promise to engage the agricultural sector in dialogue. He also told Ambassador that he was working in the Senate with Senator Reutemann to see if they could develop something that might prevent the situation from re-occurring.

¶5. (SBU) Ambassador asked Romero for his thoughts on the reorganization of the Partido Justicialista (PJ). Romero said by the end of the month they should have a slate of candidates finalized and then decide if they're going to go with a single list or open elections. He predicted that in 30 days the party would be up and running.

Comment

16. (SBU) Romero was friendly and relaxed during the meeting, and took the initiative to suggest areas where U.S. and Argentine interests may overlap. His outreach is a positive step towards developing closer relationships with Congress, which is currently emaciated but has the potential to become more vocal and effective.

End Comment.

Bio Note

17. (SBU) Romero is a life-long politician who served as a three-time Governor of Salta (1995-2007) and was elected as a National Senator in 2007. He concurrently holds the Vice Presidency of the Senate, the third-highest ranking position in that Chamber. Romero has never been perceived as a close ally of the Kirchners, but he has slowly demonstrated a willingness to work towards the reorganization of the PJ. In March, he was elected to the temporary PJ board of directors.

18. (SBU) Romero's first political post was as a National Senator in 1986. An attorney by training, he graduated from the National University of Buenos Aires in 1974. His political formulation was probably influenced by his father, who was a Peronist "caudillo" in Salta. (His father was Governor from 1986 to 1992 and held control of the local media and the Peronist political patronage system).

19. (U) Romero was born in Salta on November 16, 1950 and is married to Carmen Lucia Marcuzzi; the couple has four children. Two children live in Buenos Aires, one is studying at the University of San Andres, and the eldest is married and lives in Salta. Although Romero spoke Spanish in this meeting, he claims to know English.

WAYNE